UNITED NATIONS

TCDC

Technical cooperation among developing countries

Distr.
LIMITED

TCDC/10/L.3/Add.3
8 May 1997

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

HIGH-LEVEL COMMITTEE ON THE REVIEW
OF TECHNICAL COOPERATION AMONG
DEVELOPING COUNTRIES
Tenth session
New York, 5-9 May 1997

DRAFT REPORT

Rapporteur: Mr. Sandagdorj ERDENEBILEG (Mongolia)

Addendum

IV. SUMMARY OF THE GENERAL DEBATE

A. Overview

1. The general debate was initiated by the Permanent Representative of the United Republic of Tanzania to the United Nations, who spoke in his capacity as Chairman of the Group of 77 and China at the United Nations. He stressed the increasing significance of TCDC as an effective mechanism for facilitating the exchange of experiences among developing countries and for promoting collective action in support of their overall development as well as ensuring their effective participation in the evolving global economy. He stated that with the apparent weakening of the commitment to development cooperation on the part of the traditional partners, TCDC and South-South cooperation represented the best hope for the developing countries in the context of the emerging global order, although it should not be seen as a substitute traditional development cooperation. He highlighted some of the TCDC achievements of the past 20 years. He noted that, in general, the exchange of experiences among developing countries had demonstrated the efficiency, cost-effectiveness and relevance of TCDC as an instrument of development cooperation. TCDC projects and programmes had also generated increasing improvement in national ownership in formulating, implementing, monitoring and evaluating development activities. There was a growing awareness of the TCDC modality and its potential and an increasing commitment to identifying priorities to enhance the effectiveness of that form of cooperation. He noted, however, that structural and cultural rigidities and,

most importantly, the lack of financial resources had adversely affected the progress in the utilization of the TCDC modality.

2. He stated that the international community was slowly recognizing that the future belonged to South-South cooperation and commended the Government of Japan for its efforts to support such cooperation. He observed that it was encouraging that both the South-South Conference on Trade, Finance and Investment, held at San José, Costa Rica, in January 1997, and the Conference of Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the States members of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, held at New Delhi in April 1997, had formulated important blueprints for action on the part of the developing countries, and indeed the international community as a whole, in seeking to advance South-South cooperation.

3. He urged developed countries and the United Nations system to increase support for TCDC. He said that lack of awareness and lingering scepticism regarding the efficacy of the TCDC modality had prevented the optimal utilization of the modality.

4. He concluded by advancing four specific proposals:

(a) He proposed the convening of a special one-day session of the High-level Committee in 1998, possibly during the General Assembly, to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Buenos Aires Plan of Action;

(b) He endorsed the proposal to hold a United Nations conference on South-South cooperation to address, inter alia, the challenges presented by globalization;

(c) He urged that the separate identity of the Special Unit for TCDC within UNDP be maintained and that it be provided with adequate resources to carry out its mandate and the new directions strategy;

(d) He reaffirmed the importance of the role of the High-level Committee and suggested the possible expansion of its mandate to include a review of ECDC.

5. Most developing countries indicated their support for the views expressed by the Permanent Representative of the United Republic of Tanzania to the United Nations on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

6. The representative of the Netherlands, speaking on behalf of the European Union as well as Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Norway, Romania and Slovenia, stated that TCDC and South-South cooperation were important tools for promoting development cooperation. He emphasized nevertheless that the responsibility for TCDC lay first and foremost with the developing countries themselves. Donor countries, therefore, needed to play a supportive role in fostering the increased use of the TCDC modality in development cooperation. He expressed the view that activities at the regional and subregional level offered good prospects for TCDC.

7. He supported the concept of networking and stated that it provided a good basis for solving common problems. Internet accessibility could facilitate the

dissemination of relevant information and that it should be added to the list of priorities for TCDC. Population was seen as an issue of some strategic significance because of its relevance to the achievement of sustainable human development goals. Networking and the use of Internet facilities were also seen as eminently suitable for the application of TCDC, which could prove more fruitful than other forms of development cooperation.

8. He drew attention to five important issues:

(a) TCDC should be integrated in the overall work of the United Nations development agencies;

(b) A regional approach to TCDC would increase the chances for successful cooperation, in view of similarities of geography, language and sociocultural circumstances;

(c) The impact of TCDC would increase if the funds available to United Nations development agencies were to be used in a more focused manner, rather than spent on a large number of small projects with the risk of diluting their impact;

(d) Regional and subregional centres of UNFPA, ILO, UNICEF, FAO and UNDP should be encouraged to harmonize their efforts and to work together more closely; and

(e) In order to make the work of the High-level Committee more productive and interactive, consideration should be given to improving its present format and working procedure.

9. There was general satisfaction among delegations with the renewed interest in TCDC in recent years, but it was recognized that the rich potential of the modality was far from being fully realized. The developing countries had made considerable progress in establishing national focal points for TCDC and in using the modality, particularly in bilateral exchanges among themselves. However, in a number of countries, national TCDC policies were still not well articulated nor was the TCDC modality fully utilized as the preferred option in development cooperation. Financial constraints and attitudinal barriers also served as major impediments to the expansion of the application of the TCDC modality.

10. Most delegations underscored the primary responsibility of the developing countries in promoting and applying the TCDC modality. Consequently, the main responsibility for identifying appropriate partners, determining specific methods of cooperation and establishing achievable goals lay with the developing countries themselves. For that reason, they needed to set up internal structures and procedures for ensuring that first consideration was given to TCDC in formulating technical cooperation programmes, as is required by Economic and Social Council resolution 1992/41.

11. Most delegations recognized that in the context of globalization TCDC could serve as a powerful force for ensuring the equitable participation of the developing countries in the world economic system. Developed countries were

therefore urged to promote TCDC and to provide financial support for its application.

12. Most delegations welcomed the strategic thrust of the TCDC interventions within the framework of the new directions strategy. The focus on high-priority issues such as macroeconomic policy, trade, investment, debt management, employment creation, poverty eradication and the environment was considered essential for sustainable human development. It was generally acknowledged that such a focus would provide a major development boost to the developing countries. Some delegations suggested that informatics, population dynamics, education and health care should also receive increased attention in the context of efforts to promote TCDC.

13. Most delegations supported triangular cooperation arrangements and urged donor country funding of such programmes. It was felt that third-party funding for TCDC would significantly expand the application of the modality and that it should therefore be institutionalized. Some delegations felt that the cost-effectiveness of TCDC should be more widely publicized in order to ensure that it was better appreciated by the donors.

14. The increased use of information technology was recognized by many delegations as a powerful tool for promoting TCDC. In that context, the conversion of TCDC-INRES into a multidimensional information system was warmly welcomed. Information on successful examples of TCDC projects would also contribute to increased awareness of the importance of the modality. Some delegations felt that Internet accessibility for the developing countries would constitute a worthwhile investment for TCDC.

15. Most delegations supported the forging of a closer operational linkage between TCDC and ECDC. Consequently, the need for TCDC to be more thoroughly integrated into the broader strategy of South-South cooperation was stressed.

16. Most delegations emphasized the importance of involving the private sector and non-governmental organizations in TCDC, since a broad base of support and participation was necessary for TCDC to be effective. The increasing involvement of those new actors in TCDC activities was also noted by many delegations. The relevance of the role of mass media in promoting TCDC was also mentioned in that context.

17. Many delegations referred to the marginalization of the least developed countries and the difficult economic situation confronting them. In particular, concern was expressed regarding the difficult development problems and challenges facing Africa. It was proposed that special attention be given to ways to enable those countries to benefit from TCDC.

18. Most delegations stressed the need to maintain the Special Unit for TCDC as a separate unit within UNDP and for the Unit to be provided with adequate resources to enable it to carry out its mandate. Most delegations welcomed the establishment of the Trust Fund for South-South Cooperation and urged donors to provide generous contributions to the Fund.

19. One of the special features of the general debate in the High-level Committee was the effort to promote a more interactive pattern of exchange among delegations by inviting comments on issues raised in the statements of the various delegations. One of the issues that was raised during the exchange was the meaning of South-South cooperation and the terminology used to denote its various aspects. South-South cooperation was considered to be the generic concept of which TCDC and ECDC were two integrally related elements. It was explained that TCDC involved the exchange of technical expertise, training and the pooling of technical resources among developing countries, whereas ECDC referred to wider economic cooperation arrangements. Another important exchange that took place during the debate related to the integration of TCDC in the technical cooperation programmes of the United Nations development system. It was agreed that the Special Unit should continue to monitor the mainstreaming of TCDC in all programmes of the system. The need for increased assistance to the least developed countries in the context of TCDC also featured in the exchange. Finally, it was proposed that consideration might also be given to the possibility of focusing on special themes or topics during future sessions of the High-level Committee.

B. Review of progress made in implementing the Buenos Aires Plan of Action and the decisions of the High-level Committee and the implementation of the recommendations of the South Commission

20. Most delegations provided information on their TCDC and South-South cooperation policies and activities and others, especially the regional commissions and other United Nations development system agencies, supplemented the detailed information already provided in the report of the Administrator (TCDC/10/2).

21. Many delegations agreed with the recommendations that developing countries still needed to formulate national policies, put in place or strengthen established structures and national focal points. A number of delegations shared the view that TCDC must be consciously internalized by the developing countries and its use given first consideration in formulating technical cooperation programmes. TCDC programmes should support efforts by developing countries to adapt to the newly emerging global economy and to respond to the increasing shift towards a liberalized global trading regime.

22. A number of agencies and organizations of the United Nations system reported that their programmes have supported centres of excellence for South-South cooperation; stimulated private-sector development; fostered regional cooperative agreements, such as those relating to research, development and training in nuclear science and technology. These initiatives were undertaken through training programmes, seminars, facilitation of regional cooperation agreements, establishing networks and regional training centres.

23. The main constraints to the promotion of TCDC, as reported by many delegations and agencies, included structural and cultural differences; lack of financial resources; insufficient awareness of the benefits and potentials of TCDC; limited access to information; inadequate human resources; and lack of

coordination among the various government agencies involved in technical cooperation. One delegation stated that the difficult economic and social situation and the weakness of international efforts to coordinate TCDC were among the many factors hindering the full implementation of the Buenos Aires Plan of Action.

24. Several delegations expressed their appreciation for the FAO Framework Agreement on the Use of Experts for TCDC.

25. One delegation stated that his Government had taken a number of initiatives towards making South-South cooperation and TCDC, in particular, a mechanism of choice and policy strategy in its national development and comparative programmes. In this context, a national coordinating committee comprising government ministries and the private sector had been set up to oversee the overall implementation of TCDC. Many delegations reported the improvement in national ownership in formulating, implementing, monitoring and evaluating TCDC programmes and activities. Awareness and recognition of the potentiality of TCDC modality has grown steadily.

26. Many delegations urged the United Nations development system to increase its efforts in the promotion and implementation of TCDC and intensify the use of the TCDC modality as an important instrument of programme delivery.

27. Some delegations emphasized that South-South cooperation and TCDC should not be based on conditionality, show respect for national priorities and reflect full participation of all institutions and actors.

28. One delegation stressed that TCDC must involve, respond to and be accountable to the people who would live with the results, hence their participation in the decision-making process was important.

29. A number of delegations believed that a regional approach to TCDC would increase the chances for successful cooperation. Special attention should, therefore, be given towards strengthening subregional and regional integration and horizontal cooperation within the South-South context. One delegation pointed to the need for system-wide coordination of all TCDC activities, particularly within the United Nations system.

30. Some delegations emphasized the need to intensify the efforts towards broadening the base of support and participation, especially by the private sector, non-governmental organizations and the mass media, in promoting TCDC.

31. A number of delegations expressed the view that the full realization of TCDC objectives could only be assured in a wider framework of international development cooperation. The true value of TCDC could only be seen if it helped developing countries achieve sustained economic growth and development. Some delegations believed it prudent to broaden the funding base for TCDC, by tapping resources from intergovernmental, non-governmental and private sector organizations. It was felt that more innovative and flexible funding mechanisms should be developed to achieve that goal. In that connection, the contributions from Japan and the Republic of Korea to the Trust Fund for South-South Cooperation were highly appreciated.

32. Great concern was expressed by a number of delegations regarding the inactive TCDC focal points in a number of least developed countries and the absence of focal points in a number of other countries. This had impeded their awareness of TCDC opportunities, thus precluding access to opportunities offered by the more advanced developing countries. In this context, some delegations urged the United Nations development system to intensify efforts to address the special needs and difficulties of the least developed countries, small island States and the landlocked developing countries, and to help strengthen their capacities for undertaking TCDC activities. Some delegations stressed the importance of viable infrastructure and efficient transit transportation, which were crucial for encouraging trade.

33. Some delegations called for a more systematic approach to carrying out capacity and needs matching exercises so as to ensure that resulting cooperation programmes were better monitored and effectively implemented.

34. Some delegations stressed the need to concentrate limited resources on strategic initiatives that could generate significant and long-term impacts on the economic development of the cooperating countries.

35. Some delegations emphasized the need for innovative means and new initiatives for implementing existing agreements among developing countries, emanating from recent meetings, such as the New Delhi Conference of Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and the San José South-South Conference on Trade, Finance and Investment, in order to ensure that all parties fully benefited from existing mechanisms. One delegation stated that it is the responsibility of the developing countries to establish, define and implement their own agenda. Another delegation made it clear that "no one can do for us in the South what we are not prepared to do for ourselves". The TCDC modality could and should express that determination to act.

36. Several delegations supported the forging of a closer operational linkage between ECDC and TCDC. Many delegations expressed the view that TCDC, ECDC and South-South cooperation were fundamentally related, although they had originated in different forms, and that the operational integration of the TCDC and ECDC was needed. The greater integration of TCDC/ECDC within an integrated programme under the Special Unit for TCDC was welcomed by a number of delegations. Furthermore, South-South cooperation was an essential mechanism for promoting accelerated economic growth, development and self-reliance. The TCDC modality was an important vehicle for the strengthening and enhancement of South-South cooperation. Greater efforts should, therefore, be made at all levels to increase awareness of the TCDC modality and to sensitize all actors of its existence and to highlight the cost-effectiveness in an economic sense and the appropriateness and adaptability in technological terms.

37. Most delegations supported the proposal for the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Buenos Aires Plan of Action in 1998.

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E. Consideration of reports of the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme

1. In the interventions of several agencies, there was a heightened appreciation of the increased application of TCDC policies and procedures in their respective work programmes during the reporting period. Several cited examples of TCDC instrumentalities, such as networking among institutions and the documentation of best practices in their operational activities and their concerted efforts in using the capacities of the developing countries. Some agencies highlighted attempts to forge the operational integration of TCDC in the context of their ECDC activities. The continued validity of the guidelines was emphasized. The usual agency focal points meeting timed to follow the High-level Committee meeting is scheduled in May 1997.

2. In consideration of the organizational and supportive arrangements for TCDC, there was unanimity among the delegations on the need to preserve the separate identity of the Special Unit for TCDC within UNDP. It was noted that 0.05 per cent of the UNDP overall programme resources was allocated for the programming of TCDC activities during the period 1997-1999.

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